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ABSTRACT

The effects of cooperation between day care personnel and parents were assessed in two stages. First, action research in three experimental day care centers and two control groups created and evaluated a cooperative program. Second, the results of the research were implemented as an intervention program supporting home education in family day care and open day care settings. The intervention included (1) discussions between parent and day care staff at the beginning of the child's day care experience; (2) a pleasant start in day care; (3) parents' discussion groups; (4) confidential discussions with parents; (5) visits to the child's home; and (6) parents' participation in the activities of a working day in a day care center. Data concerning the success of cooperation were gathered from children, parents, and day care staff through interviews, evaluation, projective testing, and observation. Results are discussed in terms of the benefits of cooperation, effects on education, and effects on child development. Practical conclusions and recommendations for implementing home/day care center cooperation programs are offered. (RH)

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FAMILY AND DAY CARE IN CO-OPERATION AS SUPPORT TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Eeva Huttunen

This presentation examines the possibilities of co-operation between home and day care to support the development of a child. In the present co-operation study, the family and day care as the child's growth environments are examined using an ecological frame of reference (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The ecological approach focuses on the relationship between the child and the environment (microsystem) and simultaneously observes the relationship between the environments in which the child lives (mesosystem). The ecological approach does not only study the immediate environmental experiences, but also takes into account those elements of the environment that indirectly influence the milieu in which the child grows and develops (exosystem and makrosystem). The ecological psychology emphasizes particularly the importance of the social network as a support system for families with children. This has been proved to have a central influence on the fulfilment of the parental role and in this way also indirectly in the child (Cochran & Brassard 1979, Poulton & Poulton 1979).

From the point of view of the education at home and in day care, the ecological approach contains the following aspects:

1. The child develops in interaction with his environment and acts simultaneuosly in many different reference groups.
2. The child's possibilities for optimal growth and development are largely dependent on the extent of the co-operation between the parents and day care.
3. Day care enlarges the parents' social network by giving
   a) formal support (i.e. the educational support to parents given by day care staff)
   b) informal support (possibilities of parents to contact other families with children)

The purpose of this co-operation study was to create a co-operation program as well as to set up a co-operation experiment and study the feasibility and effectiveness of the developed program in practice.

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The goal of the co-operation was defined as support for the continuity of the child's development at home and in day care. In co-operational practice this means striving

- to improve the education at home and in day care
- to fit together educational methods at home and in day care
- to support parents in their home education by strengthening the mutual contacts among educators.

The starting points in the planning of the co-operation were

1) Educational and psychological theories about child development. The central aspects were the interactive theories of development (Erikson, Piaget and Elkonin) and earlier studies on interaction between child and parents.

2) In developing the co-operation in practice, the starting point was the parents' educational problems, their need to get advice, as well as the parents' expectations for co-operation.

3) The methods of practical co-operation were defined by official regulations during early education and knowledge about earlier studies of parental involvement in day care. Earlier studies have shown that lasting results with day care education are only obtained through close co-operatios with homes so that family and day care educate the child parallely (Woodhead 1981).

The empirical realization of the co-operation study is based on two stages. The first stage has been carried out as an action research in three experimental day care centers and two control groups. The emphasis at this stage was to create co-operation together with parents and personnel and the experimentation and evaluation of the co-operation program (Huttunen 1980). The second stage is based on the results of action research and has been carried out as a home education supporting intervention program (Huttunen 1983) in family day care and open day care.

The co-operation program included

1. Enrolment in day care (i.e. discussions between parent and day care staff at the beginning of the child's day care)
2. A "soft landing" or pleasant start in day care
3. Parents' discussion groups
4. Confidential discussions with parents
5. Visits to the child's home
6. Parents' participation in the activities of a working day in the day care center.

Measurement of the success of co-operation were directed to children, parents and day care staff. Information was acquired through inquiry, evaluation, projective testing and observation. To solve the research problems both horizontal and vertical study were used in an experiment vs. control group setting.

According to the hypothesis of the study, co-operation improves education in home and day care and makes it more consistent and more than before education is realized taking children's developmental needs into consideration. All in all, co-operation is aimed to influence by furthering of positive development in the child, which is assumed to manifest itself as a more positive behavior at home and in day care.

Results:

1. The benefits of co-operation

The evaluation of the experiment showed that co-operation increased the activity of parents' on matters of education. The most important thing in co-operation was found to be the contacts of parents with each other and the discussions and change of opinions about child rearing. In there discussions the central theme was their own child and his education. The parents observed that most of them had problems in child rearing, and that nobody is a perfect educator. The support received from other parents decreased the introversion of the nucleus family and encouraged parents to try to solve their educational problems together and to develop educational practices with the help of other parents.

The second advantage of co-operation for parents was educational advice received from the day care staff. Parents were especially interested in the educational methods of the day care centers. They tested their own educational concepts with the staff, who also gave stimuli and models for practices of home education.

2. Effects on education

Common educational discussions between home and day care personnel influenced parents' educational attitudes. They became more child-oriented than before. The attitudes also showed greater awareness and guidance in home education. The meaning of love and security for children and the meaning of rules in education became clearer in education.

According to the children, the most positive development in home education was the reactions of the adults to the disobedience of the child, in the guidance of evening situations and teaching table manners. The parents had an active role in the interaction with children, which was realized by supporting and strengthening the child's voluntary activities. The child's position in the family became more central and the child was more appreciated than earlier.

On the practical level, the educational methods at home and in day care became more consistent especially in nursing situations as a result of the co-operation. An attempt to achieve this consistency was made mutual agreements on child rearing practice in group discussions. All in all, the parents realized their importance to the children more deeply than before, and their satisfaction with their parental role increased.

3. Effects on child development

According to the evaluations of both the parents and especially day care staff, positive changes had taken place in the childrens' behavior. According to the parents, children obey them better than before. Children had learnt to demand explanations for rules, orders and prohibitions.

Independence and initiative increased in the children's behavior. The children's behavior developed especially in basic nursing situations, so that the problems connected with them decreased at home.

Co-operation had very clear effects on the children's behavior in day care. According to the views of the day care staff uneasiness and troubling behavior among children as well as their aggressiveness and offensiveness had decreased during the experiment. Also the problems connected with eating, dressing, sleeping and other basic nursing situations had decreased in day care during the co-operation. The results on the development of children's behavior showed that co-operation with parents eases the work of the day care staff with children, improves the children's social interaction and thus enables a more thorough day care education and the accomplisment of the set goals. The staff learned to understand the child's behavior through his family and background factors, enabling them to treat the child as an individual.

For children, the most important result of this co-operational experiment was an increase in positive attitudes towards the education among parent and improvement of home education, which has the most important effect on the welfare and positive development of the child.

The results received in the study of the meaning of co-operation to the child, family and day care gave an encouraging view on the possibilities of co-operation in bringing together the resources of home and day care to support the child development. It gave rise to the following practical conclusions and recommendations for implementing the home - day care center co-operation:

1. Co-operation must be seen as a part of early education and it must be uniformly applied to the educational work of homes and day care.
2. Co-operation must more than before arise from the needs of home education because it is, after all, the ability of home education to function that also determines the possibility of educating children in day care.

3. Co-operation must more emphatically be concentrated on the interaction of parents, which functions as a socially supporting network for them in experiencing parenthood and as a support in everyday matters of education.
4. The development of co-operative methods must be directed to activities that prevent problems in advance and strengthen parents' identity as educators. The decrease of parents' insecurity gives them courage to influence the day care education and to support the day care staff in their educational work.
5. The role of the day care staff must be such as to support parents and must be based on the fact that all families need support in educating their children and not only the so-called problem families.
6. Schooling and work instruction must more than before give the day care staff readiness in activities on the level of adults and in co-operation with them.
7. The definition of tasks for the day care staff must be revised so that co-operation with families is possible without practical limitations.
8. The attitudes of parents and day care staff toward co-operation must further be evaluated. Parents, as users of social services, must more clearly see co-operation as a right to get support in education and as an obligation to have influence on day care and its contents. On the whole, early education in day care must be understood in a more complete way of influencing the child's development and education at home and day care.

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